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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [EUN](#) [EI](#)
SUBJECT: IRELAND LIKELY TO ACCEPT DETAINEES, BUT WHEN AND
HOW MANY REMAIN UNCERTAIN

REF: DUBLIN 47

Classified By: Charge Robert J. Faucher; Reasons 1.4 (B)
and (D).

Summary

¶1. (C) Ambassador Clint Williamson met on February 9 with David Cooney, Secretary General in the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Sean Aylward Secretary General in the Department of Justice (DOJ), and later had lunch with Conor Lenihan, Minister of Integration, to explain how President Obama's January 22 Executive Order that the detention facilities at Guantanamo be closed would be implemented, and to stress the need for the assistance of allies and friends in resettling detainees. Though Department of Foreign Affairs officials are cautious in making a commitment to resettle detainees, and the Secretary General of the Department of Justice still appears to be adamantly opposed, Minister of Integration Conor Lenihan told Williamson that the political leaders of Ireland had already decided to accept detainees and would make an announcement before St. Patrick's Day on March 17. The only questions remaining, Lenihan said, were how many detainees would be accepted, which ones, and when. End summary.

Williamson: Guantanamo is a High Priority

¶2. (C) During meetings with top Irish government officials, Williamson stressed how important resolving the issue of Guantanamo was to President Obama and the Secretary of State, saying that the President's Executive Order closing Guantanamo within one year had been his first foreign affairs directive. Williamson noted that he was on the road so soon after the inauguration at the direct request of Secretary Clinton. Stating that the President and Secretary understood how difficult the detainee issue was for other nations, he emphasized that there would be huge recognition by Obama administration of friends and allies who resettled detainees. The entire political leadership in Washington, he said, wanted to see this issue resolved. Williamson said that the Obama administration was looking for a comprehensive settlement of the Guantanamo situation, involving law enforcement, legislation, and diplomacy. He added that the Executive Order had already made a significant change by shifting responsibility for detainee status determinations from the Department of Defense to the Department of Justice. Williamson stated that our discussions with Ireland and other European allies were focused on resettling the 24 (of 240) detainees who represented the lowest level of threat -- including 17 Uighurs -- but that others would likely be added to the list as the review process progressed.

Minister of Integration Says Decision "Has Been Made"

13. (C) During lunch, Junior Minister of Integration Conor Lenihan told Williamson that the decision to accept Guantanamo detainees had already been made by the Irish political leadership "in principle" (Ref A). (Note: Lenihan, a junior Minister, heads up the Reception and Integration Agency, is responsible for resettling refugees, a category into which, he says, the detainees would fall.) The remaining questions, Lenihan said, were how many detainees would be taken, which ones, and when. He went on to say that he was pushing the Prime Minister to move "quickly and publicly" on the issue, and indicated that the government would make an announcement prior to the presumed St. Patrick's Day bilateral meeting between the Irish Prime Minister (Taoiseach) and President Obama. In regards to the EU's failure to adopt a common position on resettling Guantanamo detainees during its January 27-28 General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) meeting, Lenihan expressed skepticism that there would be a common EU position any time soon. However, he indicated that the Irish did not see the GAERC's failure to reach consensus as forbidding individual member states from forging individual bilateral agreements. Lenihan mentioned one caveat -- he said he was reluctant to accept Uighurs because of the potential backlash from China.

Department of Foreign Affairs Remains Cautious

14. (C) Cooney opened the meeting with Aylward and

Williamson, saying that Ireland was excited about the opening of "a new era in U.S.-EU relations" and praising President Obama's decision to close Guantanamo. He declared that Ireland considered itself a "close friend" of the U.S. and wanted to be as cooperative as possible. Though he said he would prefer to deal with this matter within an EU context, he agreed that the lack of a common EU position on resettling detainees would not hinder Ireland from accepting detainees bilaterally. Cooney, however, noted that a key component of an Irish decision would be how many detainees were to be resettled in the U.S. itself. Williamson responded that ultimately the U.S. would have to bear responsibility for many years to come for the most dangerous of the detainees, since these were likely to be prosecuted and incarcerated in the U.S. Otherwise, discussions on where detainees would be placed were still ongoing and no decisions on this had yet been reached. Cooney also expressed concern about the reaction of China if Ireland resettled Uighurs. (Note: The Chinese Embassy delivered a stiff demarche to the Irish in early January warning the government not to accept Uighurs. End note.) Williamson responded that the Uighurs were the lowest threat risk of all the remaining detainees (thereby posing the lowest risk of long-term problems) and that the U.S. would be strongly supportive of Ireland in any dispute with China that resulted from a decision to resettle Uighurs.

Cooney concluded by saying that DFA officials "were not closed to the idea." He said that DFA would be reviewing the matter "very closely in the next few weeks" in order to devise a solution that was palatable to the government and to the Irish people, while taking into account the nation's budget constraints. He said that he expected the Prime Minister to make an announcement regarding the detainees before St. Patrick's Day.

Department of Justice Focuses on Impediments

15. (C) In contrast to the measured approach taken by Cooney, Aylward (who has been a consistent critic of resettling detainees) argumentatively voiced a litany of concerns, including that:

-- trade and unspecified "negotiations" with the Chinese would be damaged (and could affect the livelihood of Irish

citizens) if Uighurs were resettled.

-- the cost of monitoring the detainees to ensure that they did not re-engage in terror would outstrip the government's ability to pay.

-- Palestinian detainees might link up with other radical Palestinians in Ireland to plot terrorist attacks in third countries. (Note: He flatly refused to consider taking Palestinians. End note.)

-- Ireland must act in concert with a EU common position. (Note: Aylward pointed to the February 26-27 EU meeting of Justice Ministers as the next forum for EU discussion of the matter. While he said that Ireland should assist the U.S. by acting as an advocate within EU corridors for accepting detainees, he went to some length to point out that several EU member states had already indicated they were opposed to resettling detainees, and opined that there was little appetite within the EU for the undertaking. End note.)

-- the cost of social services and resettlement programs for detainees would be high. In addition, the detainees would likely be followed by family members, who would create additional welfare and resettlement costs -- and could themselves become radicalized.

-- detainees who had previously been "cleared" and released from Guantanamo to Saudi Arabia had returned to terrorist activities. Williamson pointed out that these were higher risk individuals who had entered Saudi prisons or reeducation centers. Nonetheless, he noted, even with low threat individuals, we could not absolutely guarantee that there would be no problems.

-- it was possible that leftist and anti-American elements in Ireland would publicly display the detainees as examples of American aggression in order to drum up anti-American sentiment, though Aylward acknowledged that much of the Ireland's "anti-American" sentiment had been "anti-Bush administration" sentiment, which has now dissipated.

-- "Scope for a bilateral agreement before St. Patrick's Day was zero."

-- the U.S. would inevitably come back and ask Ireland to accept higher-threat individuals should Ireland accept some of the low-threat detainees -- a non-starter in Aylward's view.

-- although the U.S. viewed certain detainees as low-threat, Aylward was skeptical that any were actually low-threat since they were likely to have been radicalized by their detention with other more militant individuals.

16. (C) Nonetheless, in the end Aylward conceded that there had been a sea change in public opinion since Obama's election in November. Before November, he said, he was opposed to a bilateral agreement with the Bush administration because he thought it would have little, if any, impact on the operations of the Guantanamo detention center. Since Obama's election, he said, he had changed his mind. He added that he was prepared to "bow to the fact" that the Prime Minister would "say something to President Obama" at St. Patrick's Day, implying that the Prime Minister would offer up assistance to the President.

17. (C) Notably, later in the day, at the instruction of Cooney, Irish Political Director Rory Montgomery called the Charge to assure him that the largely negative views expressed by Aylward did not reflect the Irish government's position. Montgomery said that once the final decision reaches the desk of the Prime Minister, he would decide to assist the Obama administration. Minister Lenihan also discounted Aylward's naysaying, saying that Aylward's views were "just cover," and that we "shouldn't make too much out of it." (Interestingly, Montgomery countered Aylward's assertion that economic negotiations with China might be

harmed if Uighurs were resettled, saying that there were no such on-going negotiations.)

Comment

18. (C) Cooney (Ireland's former Ambassador to the UK -- and only on the job for a week) was clearly ambushed by Aylward, who dominated the meeting with his negative views. Aylward's bluster aside (which is actually useful in pinpointing some of Ireland's concerns), it is clear that Ireland intends to accept some detainees -- most likely announcing the decision before St. Patrick's Day on March 17. However, which detainees they will accept and how many remain uncertain.

19. This report has been cleared by Ambassador Williamson.
FAUCHER